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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

5 AUG 1961

The Honorable Stewart Udall
The Secretary of the Interior
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr. Udall:

This letter is in response to your recent request for information on Soviet efforts in the field of desalination. The Soviets have a relatively small program on desalination which is poorly coordinated and directed, and which appears aimed first at obtaining highly purified water for electric power stations and second, potable water for population and industrial uses in arid regions. Only on a long-range basis does the program appear to be directed toward obtaining low-cost water for irrigation purposes.

The Soviet program does not measure up to that of the United States and is estimated to be five and possibly ten years behind ours on a point by point comparative basis. They are, however, probably ahead of most other countries, with the possible exception of the United Kingdom. It is probable that in the future the Soviet effort will follow the pattern of that of the U. S., based largely on published U. S. technology.

A highlight of the Soviet work is the installation of an electro-dialysis unit on a 5,000 ton river steamship "Tula." The reported capacity of the unit is about 12 tons per day. According to Soviet reports, the installation has been operating economically and successfully for over one year. Another similar unit has apparently been built for general agriculture purposes. It appears that the Soviets consider electro-dialysis the most favorable method of desalination for arid areas and are currently giving it more emphasis than other methods. They have indicated they plan to supply the necessary electric power for these units from wind energy generators. About three years ago the Soviet press published many articles proposing

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that the arid lands obtain potable water through use of ion exchange resins. It appears now that the ion exchange concept for this task has been displaced by electrodialysis. Despite the Soviet emphasis on electrodialysis, however, they are not as far advanced in this field as the United States.

For purely propaganda value the Soviets could offer desalination equipment to underdeveloped nations probably based on older and less economical equipment and technology now in use in the U.S. There has been, however, no single large effort or installation in desalination to come to our attention which might approach in size, significance or technical value the several pilot installations sponsored by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The installation of electrodialysis equipment by the Soviets aboard a river boat is a forward step but not in class with U. S. work.

In the United States we appear to have come to the conclusion that desalination is a problem peculiar to a particular area and that each desalination problem therefore requires an individual solution. There is no one method or equipment satisfactory for all desalination problems. We believe that the Soviets have not yet reached this conclusion and estimate that it might be five years hence before they will.

The above material brings up to date the 1958 report CIA/100-58 of 15 April 1958, entitled "Soviet Research on the Desalting of Water" (For Official Use Only), a copy of which is enclosed. Intelligence reports received since publication of this report have served to confirm the data in the report.

Sincerely,

SIGNED

Allen W. Dulles
Director

Enclosure:

CIA/SI 100-58, 15 Apr 58
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